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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 08ATHENS1188, TFGG01: RUSSIA-GEORGIA CONFLICT: ATHENS DIPLOMATIC

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g.

**#08ATHENS1188.**

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08ATHENS1188	2008-08-22 16:55	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.tanea.gr>

VZCZCXYZ0000  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTH #1188/01 2351655  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 221655Z AUG 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2373  
INFO RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0377

S E C R E T ATHENS 001188

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2018  
TAGS: [GR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: TFGG01: RUSSIA-GEORGIA CONFLICT: ATHENS DIPLOMATIC  
PUSH

REF: A. STATE 89769  
[1](#)B. 07 ATHENS 2375  
[1](#)C. ATHENS 1183

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DEBORAH MCCARTHY. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Greek MFA and MOD officials are saying the right things on Greece's support for Georgia's territorial integrity and the early withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia. At the same time, a team of Russian defense industry experts is scheduled to visit Athens next week to discuss Greek purchase of Russian armored personnel carriers (BMPs), and the Greek Parliament is scheduled to ratify the Southstream pipeline project with Russia in September. We are working to turn off both these ill-advised moves, but are getting mixed signals from Greek officials. Further discussions on these issues with Greek diplomats in Brussels and Washington could be helpful. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge delivered ref A points on the Russian-Georgia conflict to Constantinos Bitsios, diplomatic advisor to PM Karamanlis, and to Aristides Agathocles, MFA Secretary General. She urged Greece's continued support of the common NATO position and the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgian territory to their pre-crisis positions. Charge also encouraged continued Greek humanitarian assistance to Georgia and expressed U.S. appreciation to Greece for its decision to send two monitors for the OSCE mission. Bitsios

assured us that Greece firmly supported Georgia's territorial integrity and noted that he had personally pressed Russian representatives in Athens firmly on the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgian territory. At the same time, Bitsios said Greece was wary of starting down a path toward a new Cold War by isolating Russia. A better path, he argued, was one of dialogue and negotiations. We pushed back, noting that while no one wished to see a new Cold War, Russia needed to repair the damage it had done.

13. (C) Agathocles likewise underscored Greece's full support for Georgia's territorial integrity and said Greece would not accept changes to borders. He explained that it was a matter of principle for them, both in the case of Georgia and in the case of Kosovo, whose independence Greece has not yet recognized. Agathocles said they had told the Russians "strongly" that any attempt to revise borders would be unacceptable. He had asked the Russians why they were not withdrawing more quickly. They had responded that, first, they had found ammunition dumps in the captured territories and had to destroy them to keep them from falling into the hands of gangs. Second, the Russians claimed there were no law-enforcement authorities in Gori and they could not leave the area unattended. Agathocles was unpersuaded by these arguments. Like Bitsios, however, Agathocles also argued that it was not in the interests of the West to isolate Russia at this time.

#### RUSSIAN TECHNICAL TEAM TO ATHENS FOR BMP NEGOTIATIONS

14. (C) Greek press reports Thursday indicated that a team of Russian technical experts was scheduled to travel to Athens next week for discussions on Greek procurement of 450 Russian-made armored personnel carriers (BMPs). NOTE: This is part of a larger arms purchase agreement that PM Karamanlis signed with President Putin late last year. Ref 1B. END NOTE.) We raised the issue with Bitsios and Agathocles, noting that such a visit now would be unhelpful @h undercut and be inconsiQupport of the NATO posQitarian assistance e& was important not to allow Russia to think it was "business as usual" as long as Russia had troops occupying Georgian territory. Bitsios appeared to take these arguments on board but had no direct response. Agathocles thanked us for this information and said he understood that such a visit would not be helpful at this point and that they would "turn it off." A/Polcouns also discussed the issue with former Foreign Minister and reported Karamanlis confidante Antonis Samaras, who agreed "absolutely" that the optics of such a visit now would be bad and promised to make sure "those who needed to know" would be told.

15. (C) To put greater pressure on the GOG to cancel the Russian visit and to alert colleagues in the diplomatic corps to the issue, Embassy officers contacted a number of third-country embassies in Athens. Georgian Charge Zurab Aleksidze said our efforts were a good initiative, that he would report the issue back to Tbilisi, and would take up the

issue himself with Deputy Foreign Ministry Kassimis, who is heading the MFA's Georgia crisis center. UK PolCouns Lisa Whanstall also expressed concern and said she would cable London for instructions on how to proceed.

#### CHOD BLASTS RUSSIANS

16. (S/NF) DATT discussed the Russian BMP visit with Chief of Defense General Grapsas. Grapsas at first said he knew nothing of the visit but confided that if such a visit were scheduled, he would certainly have it stopped. Shortly after returning to the Embassy, Major General Reklitis called DATT and told him that the Russian technicians were coming to visit Greece but they were not sponsored by anyone in the Hellenic Ministry of Defense or Hellenic Military and were only coming to meet with civilian commercial officials. Therefore, Grapsas could not postpone or terminate the visit. COMMENT: While it is conceivable that the Russians are coming to talk to private Greek companies because there are reportedly offset provisions in the BMP deal, it is highly unlikely that the Greek Pentagon would not have contact with such a delegation. Moreover, most of the Greek defense firms are quasi-state enterprises, so a Russian meeting with "private" Greek defense firms would still likely involve Greek officials. END COMMENT.

17. (S/NF) Grapsas went on to express very negative views on the Russians. He opined that Russia was a country that could not be trusted and that history had proven this fact time and again. Grapsas underscored his distrust of Russia by pointing out that it was taking advantage of high oil prices, a result of terrorist acts, to illegitimately generate wealth and fund its military buildup and modernization. He said the U.S. should not allow the Russians to occupy Georgia and should remove them and push on into Russia to teach them a lesson. He went on to say that despite its claims, Russia was not a democracy and the world was naive if it thought

Russia could change from a hegemonic, centrally controlled, communist state to a true capitalistic democracy in only 18 years. Grapsas reiterated that Greece had historical ties with Georgia and would do whatever was required to help them. He opined that the U.S., NATO, and the EU would have to rebuild Georgia and Russia would not like it. He pledged Greek support in the form of military forces, humanitarian aid and support (i.e. diplomatic clearances for over flights and sealift), as required.

#### OTHER DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS

18. (C) A/Econcouns delivered ref A points to Peep Jahilo, Estonia's Ambassador to Greece. Jahilo indicated that there was no doubt that Estonia was firmly allied with Georgia and believed Moscow was in the wrong. He said that Estonia was one of the first countries to send humanitarian assistance to Georgia. He shared that Estonia would continue to stand with NATO and was watching developments closely. Jahilo believed that Russia had been put on notice by the NATO statements and the fact that very few countries were supporting its position. However, he noted, Russia was now taking steps to help it "save face." For example, according to him, the Russian military attach in Estonia yesterday demarched the Estonian military that it was freezing its bilateral military cooperation with Estonia for the time being. On Greece, Jahilo indicated that while he was heartened to hear recent statements by Bakoyannis he was wary of the fact that Karamanlis had been utterly silent on Russian's actions.

19. (C) A/DCM delivered reftel points to Ukrainian Charge, Taras Malisevski. Malisevski, who appreciated the information, noted that his embassy had not discussed the issue with the GoG, in large part because his Ambassador was to return to post on September 6. He did specifically state that, while Bakoyannis had made some useful statement on Georgia, his government had noticed PM Karamanlis had been "very silent" on the matter.

#### GEORGIA CRISIS AND GREEK ENERGY POLICY

10. (C) A/DCM discussed the situation in Georgia and its impact on Greece's energy policy with Else Loverdou, Energy Advisor to the Minister of Development, on both August 18 and August 22. In the first meeting, Loverdou noted that the GoG was interested in moving forward with the four-way Turkey, Greece, Italy and Azerbaijan political agreement on the TGI pipeline. A/DCM welcomed this move and outlined USG policy on Russia in wake of Georgia: now was not a time for

"business as usual" with Russia, also on the energy sphere. A/DCM specifically noted that the U.S. would be particularly concerned by Greek movement on the Southstream pipeline. The second discussion focused on an article in the August 22 edition of the Greek newspaper Ethnos, reporting that the Russian Government had just completed ratification of its bilateral agreement with Greece on Southstream, and that the GoG would now move forward quickly on its own Parliamentary ratification. Loverdou did not dispute these facts, but called the Greek ratification process "routine." She noted that the Russian Government ratification of the agreement did not require action by the Duma, but rather by the Russian Ministerial Cabinet alone. This process, she said, had now` Greek Government had, fe Southstream agreemenQr to the summer receQg in the queue" for r`ted that Parliament would@t September 25. "You do Q ratified their SouthQh Russia..." she noted. (NOTE: This has also come up in press channels and Embassy has decided to note privately to our journalist contacts that now is not the time to move forward with any Southstream-related agreement. END NOTE.)

#### COMMENT

11. (C) The Georgia crisis has put Greece in a tight spot because of its historically close ties to both Georgia and Russia. FM Bakoyannis' statement in Brussels (ref C) and the statements of other Greek officials (PM Karamanlis has been silent on the issue thus far) came out strongly for Georgia's territorial integrity and the early withdrawal of Russian troops. Greece is also supporting the OSCE monitor mission with two monitors and promises of ten more later and has provided funds and materiel for humanitarian assistance. At the same time, having a Russian technical team visit next week to discuss an arms purchase and the Greek Parliament ratifying the Southstream project would send the wrong signal to Moscow that Greece is still willing to do business as usual. We have made a push to turn off these ill-advised moves. Further discussions on these issues with Greek diplomats in Brussels and in Washington could be helpful. MCCARTHY